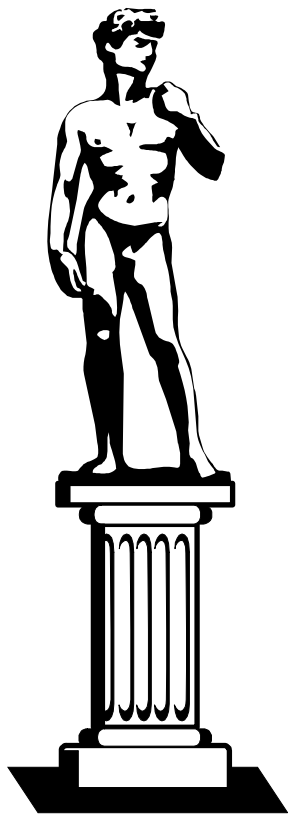


# Facts for Consumers

If You've Got  
The Look...  
Look Out!



Avoiding  
Modeling  
Scams



Federal Trade Commission  
Bureau of Consumer Protection  
Office of Consumer & Business Education  
(202) FTC-HELP [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov)

May 1999

What could be more flattering? Some one approaches you at the mall and says, "You could be a model. You've got the 'look' we're after. Here's my card. Give me a call to set up an appointment." People have always said you're good looking. Now, visions of glamour, travel and money flash before your eyes.

It's true that some successful models have been discovered in everyday places like malls, boutiques, clubs, and airports. But the vast majority of would-be models knock on door after agency door before work comes their way.

## It's All an Act

If and when you make that follow-up appointment, you'll probably find yourself in an office filled with lots of other model and actor hopefuls. Then the spiel starts. What you thought was a job interview with a talent agency turns into a high-pressure sales pitch for modeling or acting classes, or for "screen tests" or "photo shoots" that can range in price from several hundred to several thousand dollars.

Man, woman, or child – it makes no difference to bogus model and talent scouts. Often, these scouts are after one thing – your money – and will say just about anything to get it. But what they say isn't always what they mean.

## *What They Say vs. What They Mean*

Unscrupulous model and talent scouts have their acts down pat. Listen carefully to read between their lines.

- *"We're scouting for people with your 'look' to model and act."*
- I need to sign up as many people as possible. My commission depends on it.
- *"Your deposit is totally refundable."*
- Your deposit is refundable **only** if you meet very strict refund conditions.
- *"You must be specially selected for our program. Our talent experts will carefully evaluate your chances at success in the field and will only accept a few people into our program."*
- We take almost everyone.
- *"There's a guaranteed refund if you are not accepted into the program."*
- Everyone's accepted into the program. Forget the refund.
- *"You can't afford our fees? No problem. You can work them off with the high-paying jobs we'll get you."*
- We demand payment, whether or not you get work.
- *"Commissions from our clients are our major source of income."*
- Our income comes from the fees we charge you.

## Pose-itioning Yourself

To break into the business, you – the talent – need professional photos. There are two types of standard photographs – a “head shot” and a “composite card.”

- The typical marketing tool for an actor, experienced or not, the head shot usually is an 8" x 10" black and white photo of the face, with your resume printed on the back.
- A “comp card,” the typical marketing tool for the experienced model or the wannabe, usually features several shots on the same sheet, showing off the talent in different attire or settings.

Agencies and schools offer separate and distinct services. Make sure you know the difference.

- *Modeling (or talent) agencies* secure employment for experienced models and actors. Some agents require that you sign up exclusively with them; others may allow you to register with them as well as with other agencies in town.
- *Modeling and acting schools* claim to provide instruction – for a fee – in poise, posture, diction, skin care, make-up application, the proper walk, and more. Modeling schools do not necessarily act as agents or find work for you – after you take their classes, you may be on your own.

## Talent Tips



Steer clear of modeling companies that require you to use a specific photographer. Compare fees and the work quality of several photographers.



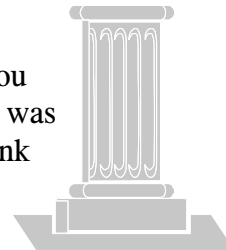
Be suspicious if a company requires an up-front fee to serve as your agent.



Be cautious if the school has a special referral relationship with a specific modeling agency. The two could be splitting your fees, or the agency may not be suited to your needs.

## Avoiding a Model Rip-Off

- Ask yourself, “why me?” Don’t let your emotions – and the company’s flattery – take control. Think carefully and critically about how you were approached: if it was in a crowded mall, think how many others also may have been approached.
- Avoid high-pressure sales tactics. Never sign a document without reading and understanding it first. In fact, ask for a blank copy of the contract to take home and review with someone you trust. If the company refuses, walk away.



- Be leery of companies that only accept payment in cash or by money order. Read it as a strong signal that the company is more interested in your money than your career.

- Be wary of claims about high salaries. Successful models in small markets can earn \$75 to \$150 an hour, but the work is irregular.

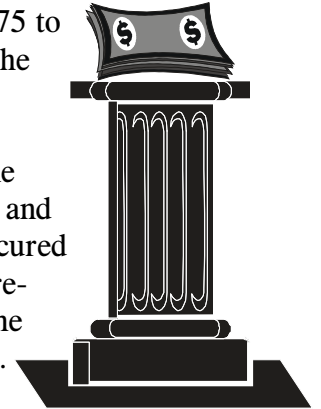
- Ask for the names, addresses and phone numbers of models and actors who have secured successful work – recently – based on the company’s training.

- Check out client claims. If an agency says it has placed models and actors in specific jobs, contact the companies to verify that they’ve hired models and actors from the agency.

- Be skeptical of local companies claiming to be the “biggest” agency or a “major player” in the industry, especially if you live in a smaller city or town.

- Realize that different parts of the country have different needs. For example, New York is recognized for fashion modeling; the Washington/Baltimore area is known for industrial or training films.

- Ask if the company/school is licensed or bonded, if that’s required by your state. Verify this information with the appropriate authorities, such as your local consumer protection agency or state Attorney General. Make sure the license is current.



- Ask your local Better Business Bureau, consumer protection agency and state Attorney General if there are any unresolved consumer complaints on file about the company.
- Get everything in writing, including any promises that have been made orally.
- Keep copies of all important papers, such as your contract and company literature, in a safe place.

## You've Got the Cutest Little Baby Face

*A special word to parents of  
infants and toddlers*

Think your child is model material? Bogus talents scouts do. And they'll gladly set up a professional photo shoot to allegedly help you get modeling and acting jobs for your tyke. Of course, they don't tell you that the market for infant models and actors is very small. What's more, because an infant's looks change quickly, the photos become outdated. In truth, few infants are marketed with professional photos. Legitimate agents, advertising agencies, casting directors and producers generally ask for casual snapshots of infants that have been taken by family members or friends.

## Where to Complain

If you've think you've been scammed by a bogus model or talent scout, contact your local consumer protection agency, state Attorney General, or Better Business Bureau. They're in your local directory assistance.

You also may file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission by contacting the Consumer Response Center by phone: 202-FTC-HELP (382-4357); TDD: 202-326-2502, by mail: Consumer Response Center, Federal Trade Commission, Washington, DC 20580, or by e-mail: use the complaint form at **www.ftc.gov**. Although the FTC cannot intervene in individual disputes, the information you provide may indicate a pattern of possible law violations requiring action by the Commission.

The FTC publishes a series of free brochures on a variety of consumer issues. You can access the FTC at **www.ftc.gov**. You also can request a copy of **Best Sellers**, a complete list of FTC publications, at: Consumer Response Center, Federal Trade Commission, Washington, DC 20580; 202-FTC-HELP (382-4357); TDD: 202-326-2502.